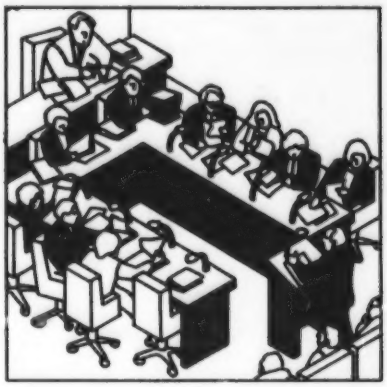
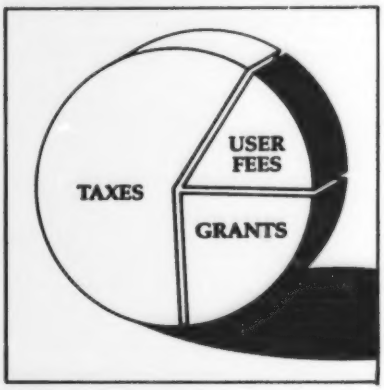
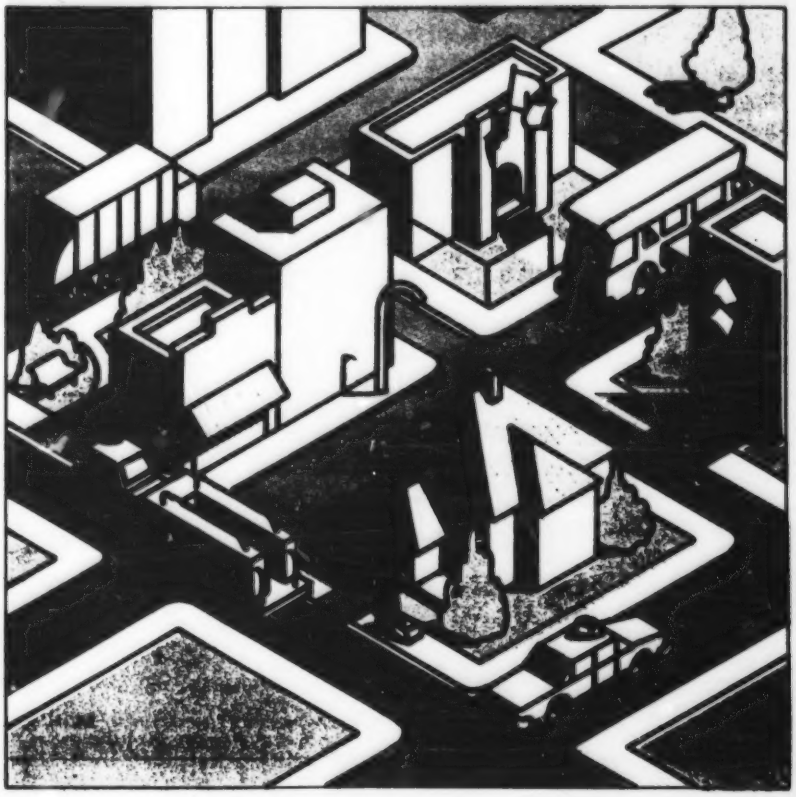
Local Government in British Columbia







– a community effort

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Local Government in British Columbia
– a community effort

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How many people does it take to make a local government?

How many people are in your community?

In British Columbia, local government is a community effort. No matter where you live in B.C., you and your neighbours benefit from local government; it provides and maintains the community's basic essential services – clean water, garbage collection, sewer systems, roads and sidewalks, street lights, and fire and police protection. Your local government may also provide other services including libraries, parks, and recreational facilities such as skating rinks, gymnasiums and swimming pools. Whether you live in a rural area, in a small village or town, or in a large urban centre, local government is responding to your community's needs, and planning for your community's future.

Introduction to Local Government in British Columbia . . .

Municipalities were first formed in the late 1800's when residents of the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island and the Kootenays saw the need for their growing communities to have the benefit of locally provided, and locally controlled, services. Municipalities are still being created today when a community desires a way to provide and develop its own services. A municipality is created through one of the most basic processes of democracy - forming a local self-government through a community vote.

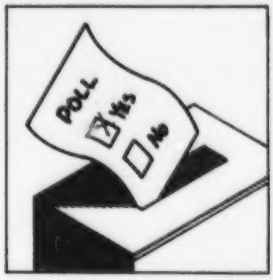
Regional districts were formed in the mid-1960's to perform two functions. They provide a way to deliver local services to areas outside of municipalities and a way for municipalities and the rural areas to jointly fund services which are of a benefit to the region.

Local government is the most accessible and responsive level of government. It is staffed by members of the community, and the elected officials, known as municipal Councils or regional Boards, are also comprised of local citizens. Together with the citizen volunteer and advisory groups, local government is you and your neighbours - a community effort.

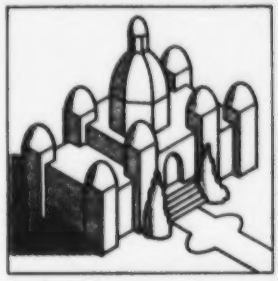
The terms we use:

ADVISORY GROUPS - groups of people from the community who help the local government make decisions.

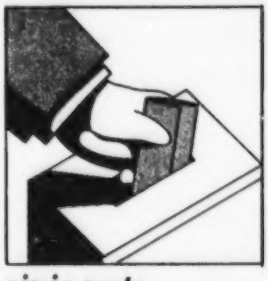
How local government is formed and how it works



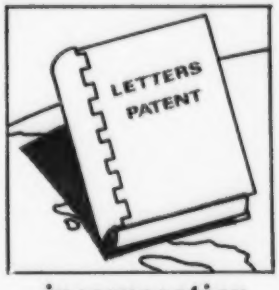
democratic process



the provincial role



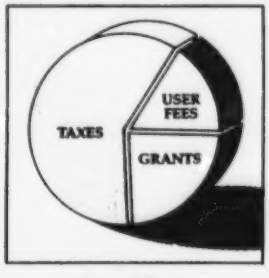
civic vote



incorporation

the community

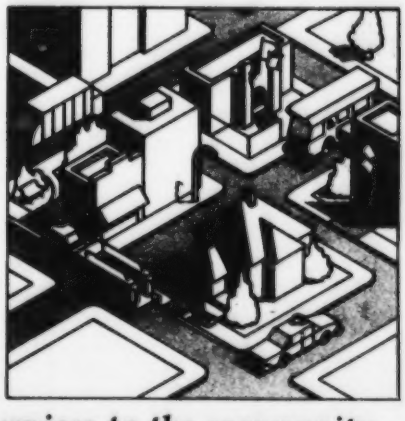
elected officials



funding

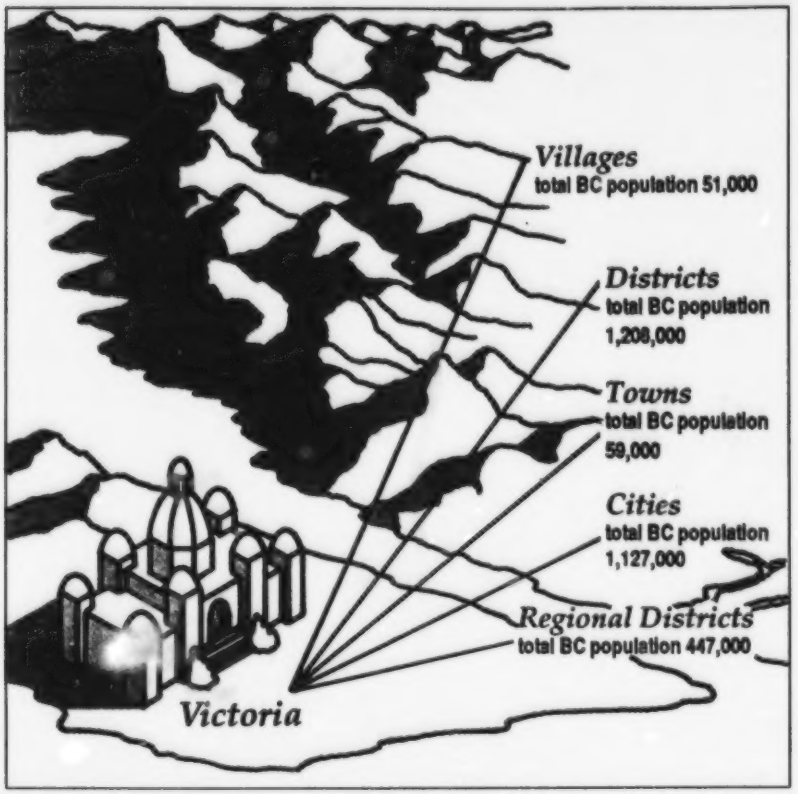
policy

administration



services to the community

How Local Government is Created



Under the Canadian Constitution, local government can only be established and granted its powers by the provincial government.

Cities	39
Districts	49
Towns	15
Villages	46
Regional Districts	29
Islands Trust	1
Total	*179*

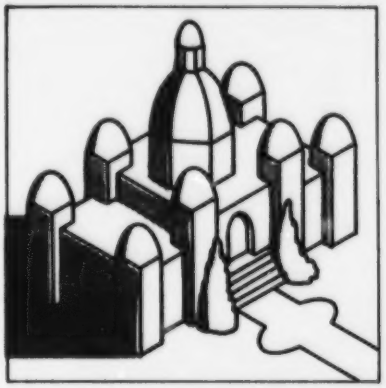
The provincial government sets out the ground rules governing municipalities and regional districts in a provincial law called the Municipal Act. This Act is the framework which guides the creation of local government and covers all facets of its operation, from how elections can be held and when budgets must be adopted, to what goes into a zoning bylaw. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture is responsible for local government in British Columbia and not only provides advice to municipalities, but to a certain extent, oversees their actions, particularly with regard to financial matters.

The Community

A request is made by local residents to the Provincial Government for assistance in forming a self government.

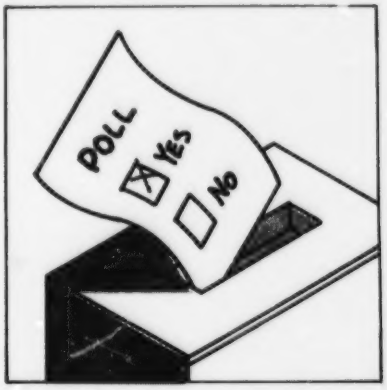
The Provincial Role

The Provincial Government through the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture in Victoria provides assistance in the process of incorporation.



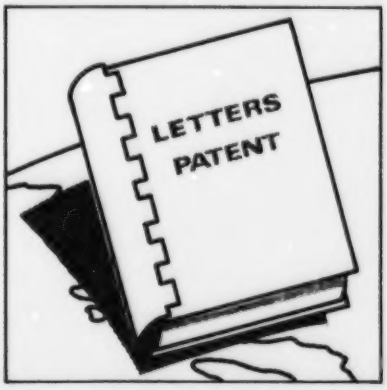
Democratic Process

Boundaries are set and a poll is taken. Over 50 percent of the votes cast must be in favour of incorporation.



Incorporation

Under the *Municipal Act, Incorporation* of the area is granted through *letters patent* by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (The Cabinet)



The terms we use:

MUNICIPAL ACT - a provincial law that sets the ground rules for municipalities and regional districts. It provides the legislative authority for local governments to create bylaws, budgets and undertake local services.

LETTERS PATENT - specify the Municipality's name, boundaries, area and class; make provision for the election of the first council; cover the financial set up of the newly incorporated municipality

URBAN - relating to a city or town.

MUNICIPALITY - a city, district, town or village having the power to govern themselves.

LEGISLATION - laws made by the local government, provincial government or federal government.

BYLAW - a rule made by an organization to govern its members and control its action.

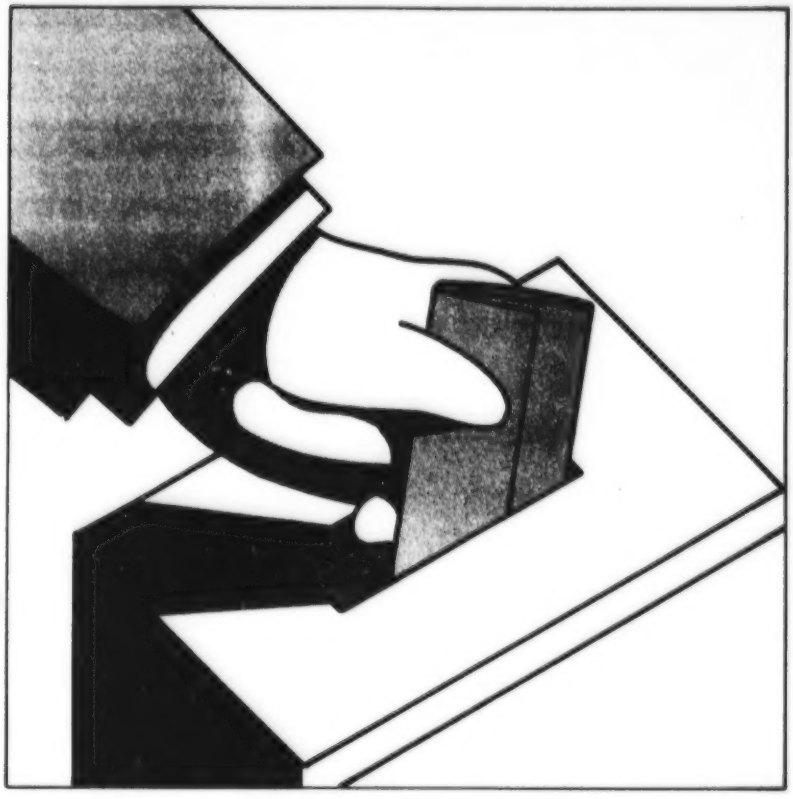
INCORPORATION - a community is given the status of city, town, district, or village; boundaries are established, and they are given power to govern themselves.

RESOLUTION - a decision, opinion, policy, or instruction of a municipality or regional district, expressed in a formal written document and voted on.

Civic Vote

Are you on the List of Electors?

Each municipality and regional district is responsible for preparing and maintaining the list of electors. In the election year, they will prepare a new list of electors that will be used for the election. This list will contain, so far as available, the name and address of every person who is qualified to vote in the election. Any citizen can ensure that their name is on the list of electors by filling out a registration card at the municipal or regional district office. You must be able to provide evidence that you meet the qualifications.



All mayors, aldermen, and regional directors are elected for a three-year term, and elections are held throughout the province every third year on the third Saturday in November. At the same time as local elections are held, referendums may be held on questions affecting municipalities and regional districts.

Any Canadian citizen whose name appears on the voters' list for the current year anywhere in the province of British Columbia is qualified to run for election as a council member. There are, however, certain principles that prevent an individual from being nominated, elected or holding office. Any person who works for local government, either as an employee or under contract, who has an undischarged bankruptcy, or has been convicted on indictment of an offence in Canada is ineligible to run for local election.

Voting in Municipal Elections

You are entitled to be registered as an elector and vote in a local election if you are:

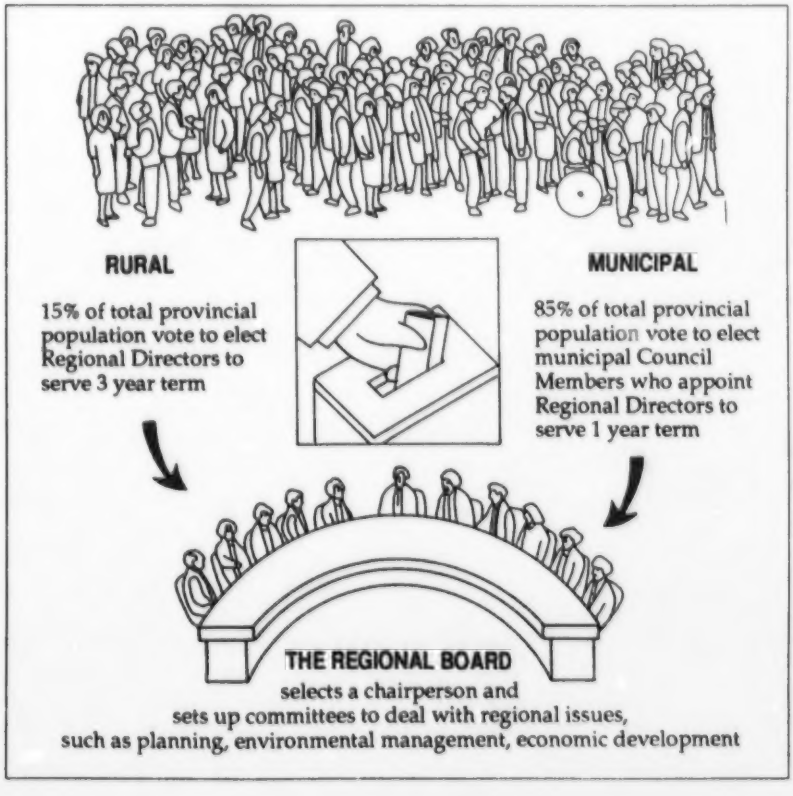
- a minimum of 19 years of age;

- a Canadian citizen;
- have resided in British Columbia for 6 consecutive months prior to seeking registration as an elector;
- own or rent property in the municipality on the date of registration or have resided in the municipality for 3 consecutive months prior to this date;
- have no disqualification under the Municipal Act or any law in force in British Columbia.

A person who owns or rents land in a municipality, but does not reside in that municipality, is entitled to register as an elector and vote in that municipality.

Subject to certain conditions, a corporation that owns or tenants lands in a municipality is also entitled to be registered as an elector. Details as to the conditions of registration for corporations can be obtained from the Clerk of the municipality.

If you are qualified but are not on the electors' list you can vote by registering on the day of the election. A corporation, however, cannot vote if its name is not on the list, as corporations cannot register on election day.


RURAL
15% of total provincial population vote to elect Regional Directors to serve 3 year term
MUNICIPAL
85% of total provincial population vote to elect municipal Council Members who appoint Regional Directors to serve 1 year term
THE REGIONAL BOARD
selects a chairperson and
sets up committees to deal with regional issues,
such as planning, environmental management, economic development

Election to Regional Boards

Regional districts are governed by a board consisting of two types of directors. Electoral Area Directors are elected directly by rural area voters and serve three year terms. Municipal Directors are first elected to a municipal council and are then appointed by the council to the regional district board for a one year term.

Elected Officials

Council and Board Indemnities

Municipal councils and regional boards can provide, by bylaw, for an annual indemnity for the mayor, aldermen, or board members to be paid out of general revenue. A portion of the remuneration can be paid as an allowance for expenses incidental to the discharge of the duties of office.

The indemnity, or money paid, is made in recognition of the time Council members must spend away from their families, businesses or employment in order to fulfill the requirements of public office.

The basic responsibility for local government services and decisions lies with municipal councils and regional district boards.

Once a municipality is incorporated a mayor and council is elected to determine its policies and oversee its responsibilities. The council is the governing body of the municipality and is responsible to see that its powers are used for the benefit and protection of its citizens.

The regional district board is comprised of elected rural representatives and appointed municipal representatives - the board has the same administrative and legislative responsibilities as a municipal council.

Decision Making

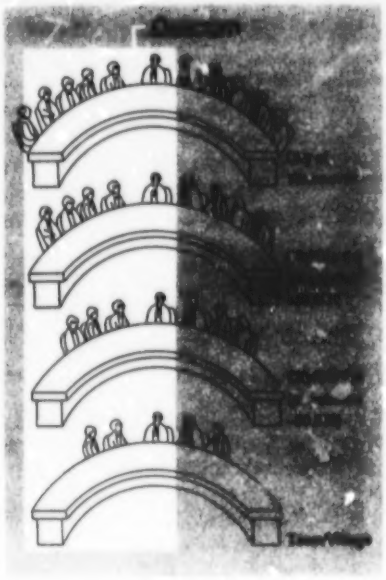
All powers of a Council or Regional District Board are exercised by bylaws and resolutions.

- The Municipal Act states that these decisions can only be made at the regular, or at specially convened, Council meetings where there is a quorum, or fixed number of Council members present.

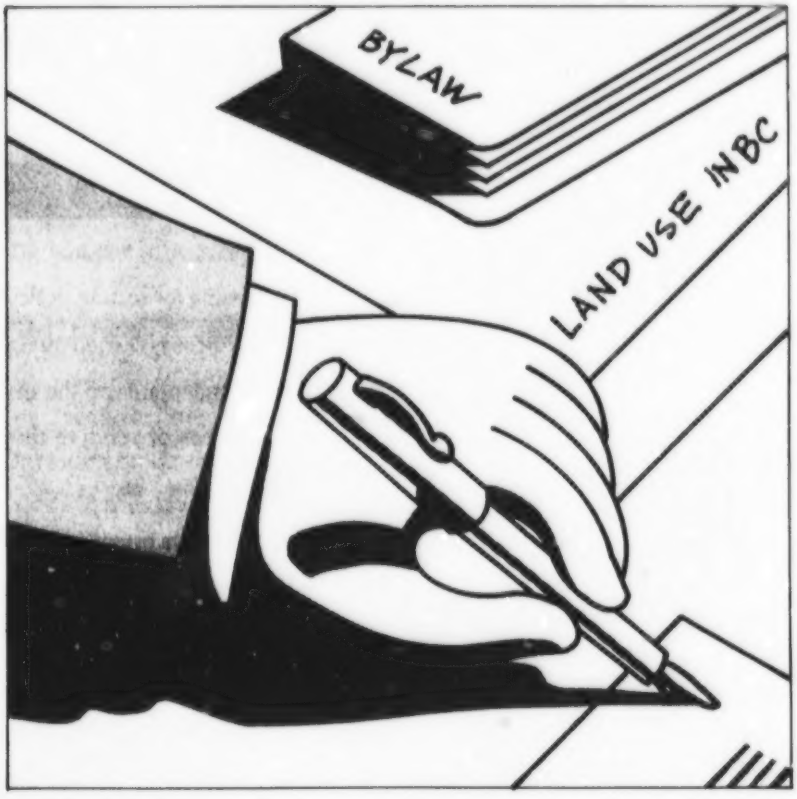
The City of Vancouver has an eleven-member Council consisting of the mayor and ten aldermen. A quorum will be six of its members.

The council of cities or districts having a population of more than 50,000 people will usually consist of a mayor and eight aldermen. A quorum is five members. Any other city or district will usually have a council consisting of a mayor and six aldermen. In this case, the quorum will be four members.

Towns and villages are represented by a mayor and four aldermen, with a quorum of three members.



Policy



Council establishes policies for the community and adopts bylaws or resolutions based on these policies. It must then ensure that these policies are executed by the municipality's administration in the day to day business of the community.

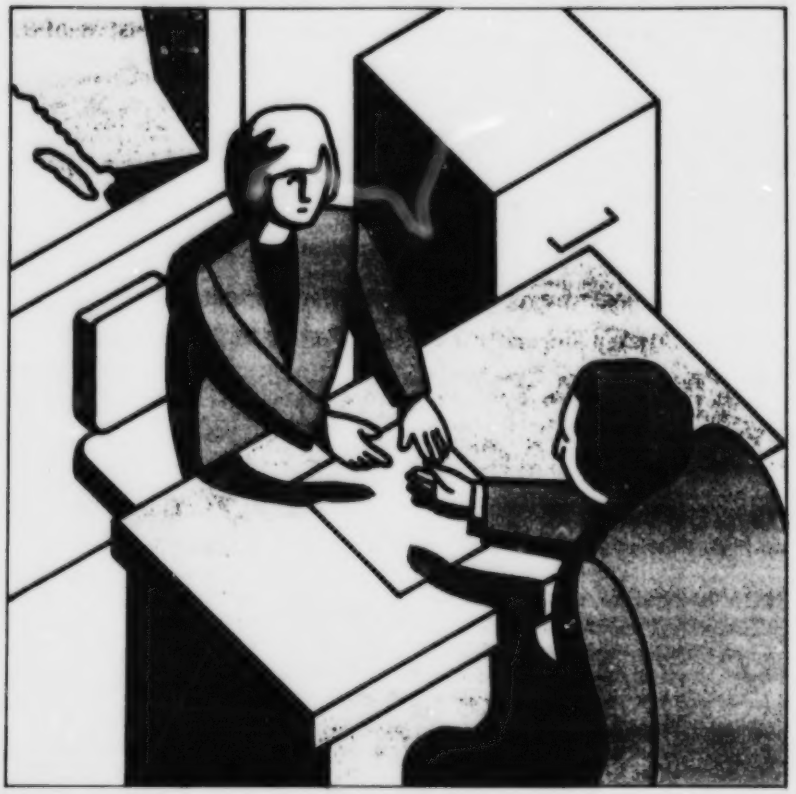
The terms we use:

INDEMNITY - money paid.

REMUNERATION - money paid to a person.

EXPENSES INCIDENTAL TO THE DISCHARGE OF DUTIES - what it costs a person for things such as meals, gas, etc. when on government business.

Administration



The terms we use:

PROTOCOL - correct procedure to be followed at meetings.

While your elected officials are responsible for setting policy, the actual work of providing local services is carried out by employees. The number of employees depends on the size of your municipality or regional district and the types of services they provide.

In all but the smallest local government offices, the staff is organized into departments. Most medium to large offices have departments for Public Works, Finance, Personnel, Fire, Planning, Building Inspection, Parks and Recreation, and the office of the municipal Clerk.

Local governments employ people with a variety of skills. In addition to the more usual jobs of engineers, accountants, electricians, plumbers, truck drivers, secretaries and carpenters, there are some unique jobs such as firefighters, animal control officers and sewage treatment plant operators.

Some of the key people that are working on your behalf to make your community a better place to live are listed on the following pages.

The Administrator

The chief administrative officer of a municipality or regional district is usually called the Administrator or Manager. In smaller municipalities this role is generally assumed by a Clerk/Treasurer.

Regardless of title, this person is the individual charged with the overall efficient delivery of policy and services throughout the municipality or region. The Administrator reports directly to the Council or Board. In addition, the Administrator often provides business advice to the Council or Board and acts as its representative in negotiations with other government bodies, businesses and property owners.

The Clerk/Regional Secretary

The Clerk, or in regional districts - the Secretary, is one of the more visible local government employees, acting as the link between the public, staff, and the Council or Board. The Clerk is responsible for preparing agendas, keeping minutes of meetings, publishing official notices, drawing up bylaws, safeguarding public documents, and providing public information.

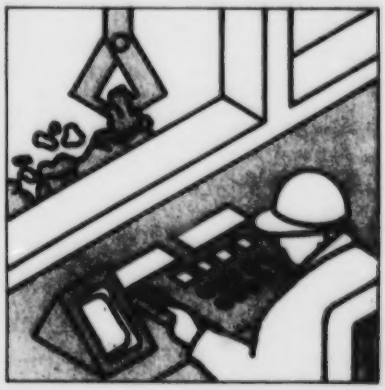
The Clerk is the 'expert' on protocol and procedure and advises the elected officials as required. Official correspondence is usually addressed to the Clerk, who also has the authority to enter into correspondence on behalf of the Council or Board.

The Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for local government's finances. In addition to the usual accounting functions, and the preparation of financial statements, the Treasurer is responsible for the safekeeping of money and securities, for investing funds and for ensuring that local government's expenditures are made in accordance with its policy and the law.

The Treasurer is responsible for the preparation of the provisional and annual budgets and for the preparation of the municipality's five-year capital expenditure program.

The Treasurer is the elected officials' financial adviser and is expected to provide advice on financing capital projects, balancing the budget, the legality of expenditures, and on taxation policy.



The Engineer

The Engineer is responsible for what generally is termed 'public works'. This might include the planning for, construction of, operation and maintenance of a wide variety of local government services - roads, garbage disposal, and water and sewer systems.

The Planner

Most large offices have a planning department, which is responsible for planning the development of the community and for preparing and administering land use regulations and laws. The Planning Department gathers statistical information on the community and often acts as a source of information for people who are interested in local investment.

Most municipalities or regional districts have community plans, which are used to guide growth and development. A good community plan helps to organize development so that the costs of services, such as roads, water and sewer can be minimized. A plan informs people about what kind of activities are likely to occur in their neighbourhood, and makes it possible for residents to play a larger role in determining how their community will develop.

The Approving Officer

The Approving Officer is appointed by the Council and has authority to approve subdivision plans. Although the Council establishes the standards for subdivisions, the Approving Officer is responsible to the Province and must base approval on legislation that is set out in the Land Titles Act, Municipal Act, Condominium Act and Limitations Act.

The Building Inspector

Every municipality and regional district that regulates building construction appoints a Building Inspector who is responsible for approving plans, issuing building permits and inspecting construction. The Building Inspector is often called upon to provide advice to builders on the interpretation of codes, and works closely with the agencies responsible for electrical, gas and sewage disposal permits and inspections.

The Recreational Director

In many municipalities and regional districts, a Parks and Recreation Director is responsible for the planning, development and management of the parks and recreational facilities. The Director is also required to provide a technical advisory service to volunteer leisure organizations and is responsible for leisure facility programs.

The Collector

The Council is required to appoint a Collector, who quite often is also the Treasurer, who is responsible for:

- preparation of the tax roll;
- collection of taxes; and
- conducting tax sales for delinquent taxes.

The Auditor

Every Council or Board must appoint an Auditor. The Auditor is an accountant and can not be an employee . He or she is an independent adviser,

whose major duty is to audit the accounts and financial transactions and to report on the state of the accounting. The Auditor can also look into any expenditure to see if it complies with the law.

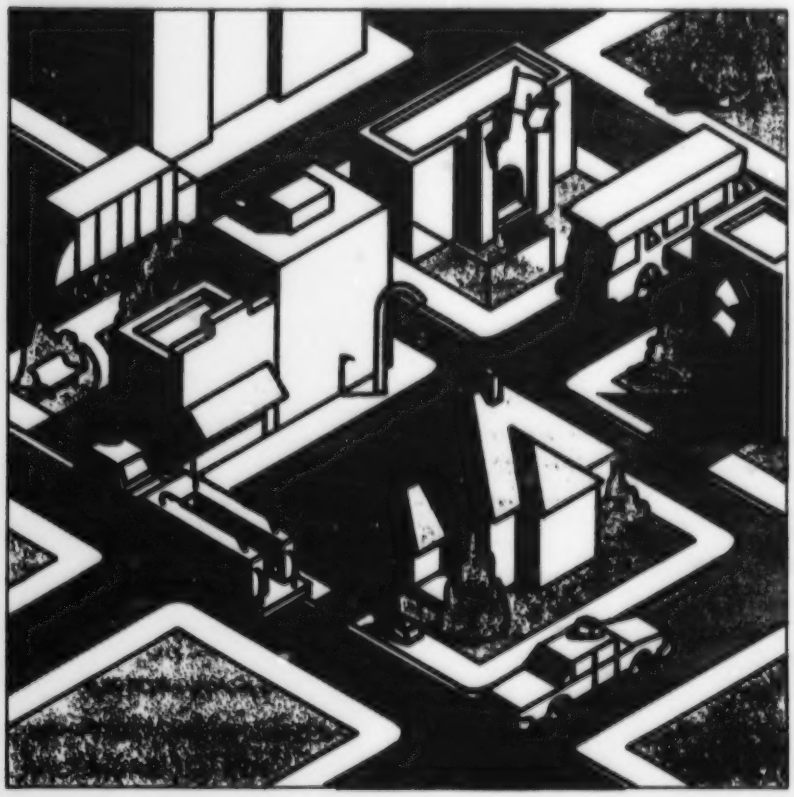
The Auditor must be given complete and free access to all of the municipality's financial records.

The terms we use:

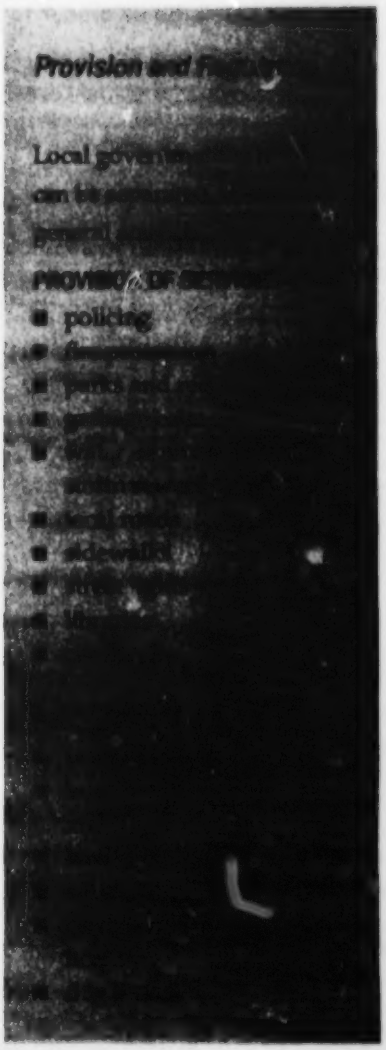
LOCAL SERVICES - water, sewage disposal, fire protection, roads, and sidewalks, garbage collection, street lights, and any other service essential to the well-being of municipal or rural communities.

SUBDIVISION - dividing a single piece of land into two or more lots.

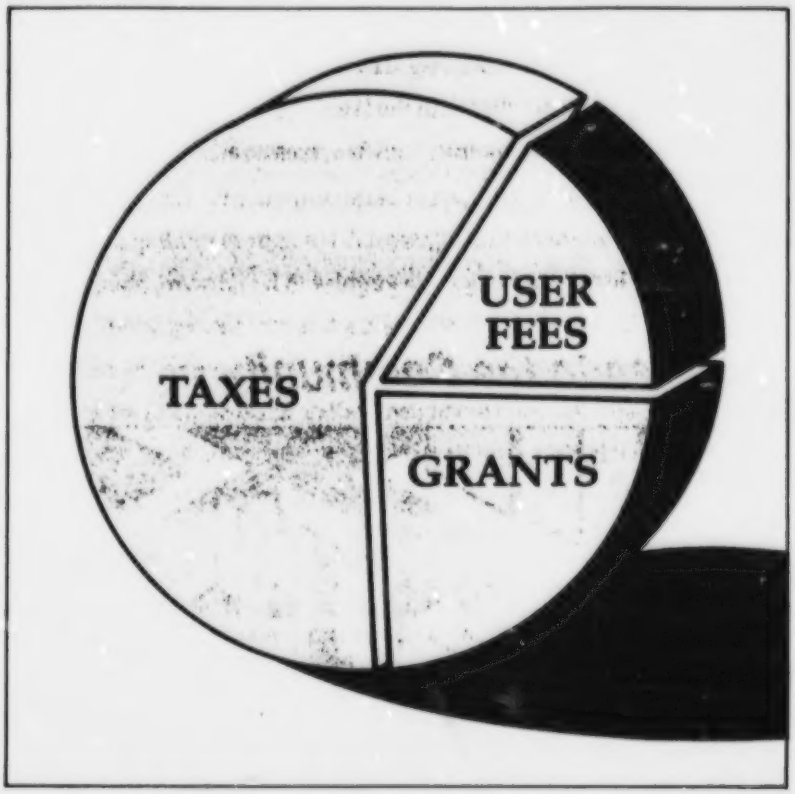
Services to the Community



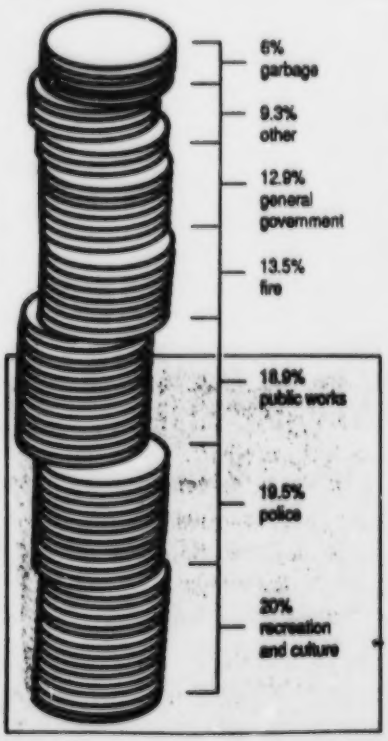
ocal government provides essential basic services - clean water, garbage collection, fire and police protection, street lighting, libraries, recreational facilities and parks, local roads, water and sewer systems, and planning for the future economic growth of the community. The range of local services provided by B.C.'s 179 local governments is as diverse as the provincial landscape. These services are provided through a variety of sources of funding.



Funding



Municipal Operating Expenditures



ess than one-half of the average tax bill goes to pay for municipal services - most of the rest goes to pay for schools. Nevertheless, local government is big business. Overall municipal operating expenditures are in excess of $1 billion annually. Regional districts spend another $300 million a year in total.

Because local government is a service industry, it is not surprising that 60 percent of a typical municipal budget goes to salaries. Local governments in B.C. employ some 30,000 individuals.

The most expensive services are typically police and fire protection, public works and recreation. This varies between municipalities depending upon whether they actually provide the service and the level of service they provide. For example, municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents are not responsible for police costs. While some municipalities have full-time fire departments, most rely on volunteer fire departments.

The portion of the budget that goes to recreation can vary widely depending on what type of facility each community has decided it wants and can afford.

Some examples of where the money goes are shown to the left. The diversity in expenditure patterns only serves to underline the strength of local government - its ability to reflect local needs.

Three Sources to Fund Services

Local government has the ability to raise funds to provide and maintain services and amenities within the community. These revenues are raised from three main sources:

- Property taxes
- Grants from other levels of government
- Special user charges

On average, 60 percent of the money needed each year to provide and maintain services is raised through property taxes. The federal and provincial governments provide grants-in-lieu of taxes for land they own within a municipality. The provincial government also pays grants to local government; grants which make up 10 percent of the average municipal budget. Conditional grants are grants made for specific purposes such as sewer and water system construction. However, the larger portion of provincial grants are unconditional grants whereby the municipality itself can determine how the money is spent.

Local government also raises revenue by renting, selling or otherwise charging fees for the use of its facilities or services. Some of these charges include fees for garbage pickup, swimming pool and arena admission fees and fees for subdivision approvals.

Strict Municipal Budget Controls and No-Deficit Financing

On or before November 30 of each year, the Council directs the Treasurer or chief financial officer to prepare a provisional budget for the following year. This provisional budget is supplied to each member of the council at the inaugural meeting of the Council on the first Monday in December. This provisional budget becomes the basis of the annual budget, which, by bylaw, must be adopted on or before May 15 in each year. An expenditure not provided for in the annual budget or in an amended budget is unlawful. The annual budget may only be amended by bylaw.

The terms we use:

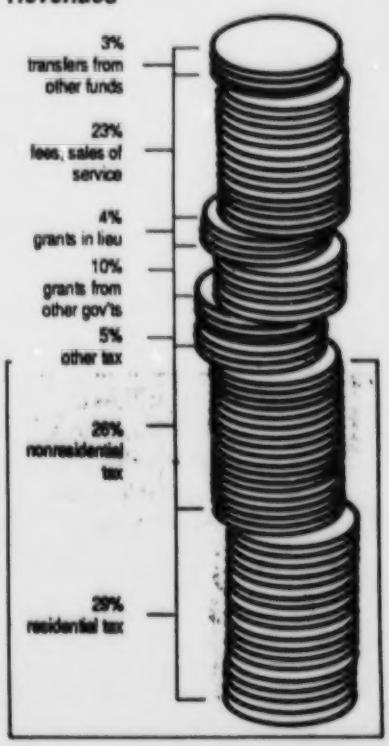
BUDGET- a detailed plan showing where the organization will get their money from (revenue) and what that money will be spent on (expenses).

CAPTIAL EXPENDITURE- money spent on things of high value that have a useful life of more than one year.

DELINQUENT TAXES- property tax that was not paid by the due date.

EXPENDITURE- something money is spent on.

Sources of General Municipal Revenues



As well, by May 15 of each year, the Council is to have adopted, by bylaw, a capital expenditure program for at least five years. This program will show proposed sources of funds and their application for capital projects such as building construction or land and equipment purchases.

The annual budget and the capital expenditure program are, in a sense, the operating plan for the year. The budget tells staff and the public what types and quality of services are to be provided. The capital expenditure program is council's plan for the development and improvement of municipal facilities.

Unlike provincial and federal governments, local government cannot run a deficit in their current operating accounts. Each year they must balance their budget.

Keys to Municipal Borrowing – Limits, Ratepayer Involvement, and 'Triple A' Rating

Local government can borrow monies to finance capital projects, such as water and sewer system construction, recreation facilities, and roads. The amount they can borrow is limited by the Municipal Act. Borrowing for water, sewer and storm sewers can be incurred on the initiative of Council, but most other borrowing must be approved by the electors.

All municipalities and regional districts (except the City of Vancouver) finance long-term debt through the Municipal Finance Authority. The Authority, which is established under provincial law and managed by representatives of 29 regional districts, has an excellent credit rating, due to the security it can offer to lenders and the stable finances of local government in British Columbia. The result is that every municipality and regional district in the province, regardless of size and local circumstances, can borrow at rates that are usually only available to the largest governments and corporations.

Basics of the Property Taxation and Assessment System

Every property owner in British Columbia contributes to the funding of their local government. Each year, property owners are sent two notices - an assessment notice and a tax notice. Both these notices reflect the process through which their share of the local tax base is calculated.

Calculation of property tax involves a two-step process. The first is to set the value of the property (the "assessed value"). The second step is to apply a tax rate to the assessed value of the property to determine the property taxes payable. The amount of tax a property owner will pay is calculated as:

ASSESSED VALUE x TAX RATE = PROPERTY TAX PAYABLE

Two groups are involved in assessment and property taxation: the B.C. Assessment Authority and taxing authorities. The main taxing authorities include provincial and municipal governments, school districts, regional districts and hospital districts.

The Assessment Authority is responsible for the first part of the process - real property assessment. The taxing authorities are responsible for the second part of the process - establishing the tax rate.

The Assessment Authority is an independent agency that determines the assessed value and the correct classification for every home, business, farm and industry in B.C. It then provides taxing authorities with a list of all properties and their assessed value. This list is known as the "Assessment Roll."

Once the taxing authorities have determined the amounts they will receive from provincial transfers and other sources (such as user fees), the taxing authorities set tax rates sufficient to raise their required revenues. These tax revenues, collected by either a municipal authority or the provincial government are then used to provide roads, schools, hospitals, sewers, a police force, fire and many other local services.

your Home Owner Grant

what your taxes are based on

your contribution to education

1991 TAX NOTICE: **MUNICIPALITY OF PORT PLESANT**
Municipal Hall,
Port Pleasant,
B.C. V5T 1Z1

Mr. John Doe,
123 Mt. Pleasant Rd.,
Port Pleasant,
B.C., V5T 1Z1

PROPERTY TAX LEVIES	TAXABLE VALUE	RATE	TAX PAYABLE (under 65 years)
Local School Tax-residential	65,000	7.07	459.55
Less Home Owner Grant			430.00
Net School Taxes			29.55
General Tax - residential	65,000	10.23	664.95
Regional Dist. - residential	65,000	.49	50.05
Hosp/BCAA/MFA - residential	65,000	.66	42.90
Water Frontage Tax	50	1.25	62.50
Gross General & Other Taxes			820.40
Less Residual Home Owner Grant			0.00
Net General and Other Taxes			820.40
TOTAL OUTSTANDING TAXES			**$849.95**

your total bill

frontage tax

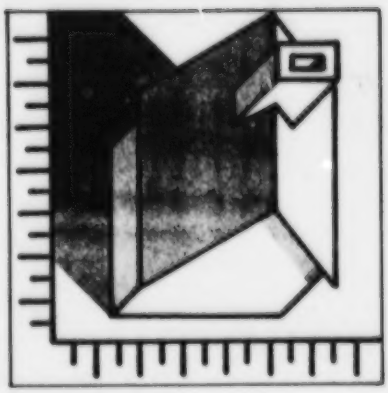
how much you pay for every $1000 of taxable value

your other local government service costs

your cost for regional services

your contribution to general municipal services

Property Taxation



How Are Tax Rates Set?

A municipality arrives at its tax rates through a three-step process:

1. Budgeted expenditures minus all other revenue sources = total property tax to be raised.
2. Total property taxes are then split to give the taxes to be raised by each class of property (i.e. residential, commercial).
3. Assessed value for that class divided into taxes to be raised by that class will equal the Tax Rate (converted to $ per $1,000 of assessment) to be levied.

Sharing the Tax Burden – Variable Tax Rates

Since 1983, Councils have had the power to set tax rates for each class of property for general municipal purposes. These rates are applied to the actual value of the property, less any tax exemptions. The allocation of the tax burden between classes has therefore largely become a local responsibility.

Councils can now compensate for a wide disparity of property value changes and yet maintain a stable share of the tax burden between the broad classes of property (residential, business, industry). There is no provision to use the variable tax rate system within a class other than residential. Starting in 1990 councils may set different rates for residential land and improvements. They may also use a flat or parcel tax in conjunction with the property value tax.

Property Tax Relief

Taxpayers may be eligible to have taxes reduced through grants or deferrals. All residential homeowners under the age of 65 are eligible for a provincial Home Owner Grant. An additional Home Owner Grant is available for seniors and the handicapped. Beginning in 1990, a supplementary Home Owner grant is available to offset basic school taxes for eligible homeowners. As well, homeowners over 60 years of age may apply for a deferral of taxes. The province pays the taxes owing and the taxpayer repays the province at a future time, such as when the property is sold. Interest, at a rate set by the provincial government, is applied to the deferred taxes.

Other classes of properties may be eligible for other exemptions. For example, there is a commercial assessment exemption and a tourism assessment exemption. Taxing legislation, such as the Municipal Act, provides that certain property (for example, churches) may be exempt from taxes.

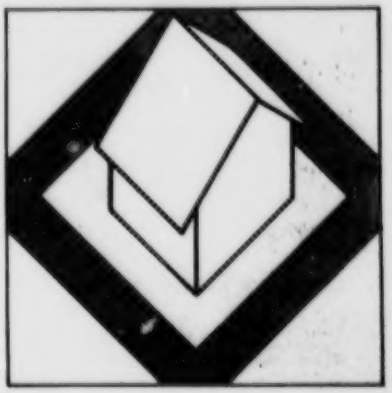
Rural and Regional District Taxation

Areas outside a municipality, the unincorporated areas, receive two main tax levies - those made by the provincial government and those made by the regional district.

- The province levies property taxes in these areas to fund police and roads.
- Regional districts do not collect property taxes themselves, but submit requisitions to the province and to the municipalities in the regional district. If an area in a regional district falls under provincial jurisdiction, the province will levy a property tax, and then forward the required amount to the district.

Who Can Tax Your Property?

Who are the taxing authorities and what do they do?



149 Municipalities depending on their size and resident desires, they can provide police, fire, water, sanitary and storm sewers, street lights, libraries, garbage collection, parks and recreation, cemeteries.

29 Regional Districts provide local services to rural areas and provide services to municipal and rural areas that are most economically done on a joint basis (fire, water, recreation, etc.).

Provincial Government provide police and local road services in rural areas and tax to provide a part of the funding for schools.

75 School Districts provide kindergarten to grade 12 education using provincial funding and, in some cases, local school spending taxes.

29 Regional Hospital Districts share capital funding of hospitals with the province.

300+ Improvement Districts provide water, fire protection, etc., generally in rural areas.

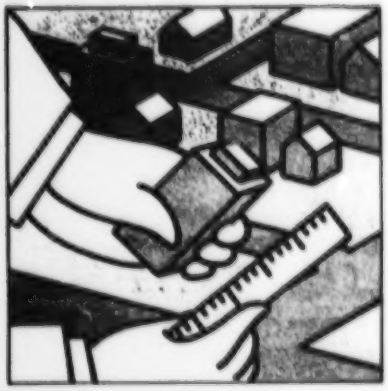
Indian Bands can tax lands within their boundaries.

British Columbia Assessment Authority and Municipal Finance Authority each levy a small tax to fund a portion of their budgets.

Assessment

Who Assesses Properties?

Since 1974, all property assessments have been carried out by the British Columbia Assessment Authority (BCAA). The BCAA is responsible for determining actual value assessments for all homes, businesses, farms and industry in the province. Establishment of the BCAA came following recognition that there was a lack of uniformity in assessments from municipality to municipality and that it was difficult for taxpayers to understand how the value of property was established. Today's Assessment Authority is an independent, publicly funded agency, with 23 area offices province wide, and a database containing information on 1,268,742 properties.



A Two Year Assessment Cycle

A new assessment roll is completed on the 30th day of September in each even-numbered year. This roll lists every property liable to assessment in the province under the appropriate property tax class.

In the second year, a 'revised' assessment roll is completed. The 'revised' roll contains a list of only those properties which have undergone physical change since completion of the last assessment roll.

A copy of each entry (the assessment notice) is sent to the owner every year.

How are Assessment Values Established?

Assessed values are established by determining the actual value of a property. Actual value of residential property is the market value (estimated sale price) as of a specific date. To determine actual value of a property, the assessor takes into account the location, size, topography, shape, replacement cost, age, condition, sale price of comparable properties in the area, and any other factors that might affect the property's value.

The assessed value of a property is determined by subtracting exemptions where appropriate from the actual property value.

Assessments can be Appealed

Although there is no legislative provision for appealing property taxes, as-

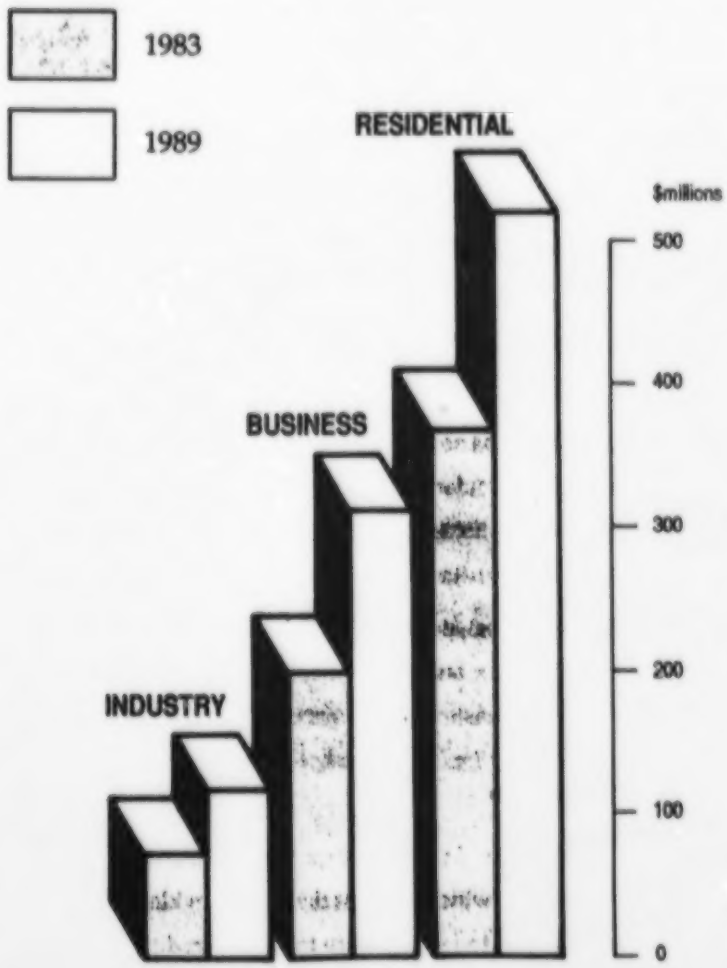
sessments established by the B.C. Assessment Authority are subject to an extensive appeal procedure through the Court of Revision, the Assessment Appeal Board and the B.C. Supreme Court. Assessments can be appealed at the time the assessment notice is mailed by the Assessment Authority.

Why do Actual Values Increase or Decrease?

Changes in assessed value reflect changes in market value. The market value of a property can change for many reasons:

- the owner may have improved the property by adding a garage or finishing the basement;
- demand for property in the area may have caused prices and market values to change;
- the municipality could have altered the zoning for the area.

Municipal Property Tax Levies by Class



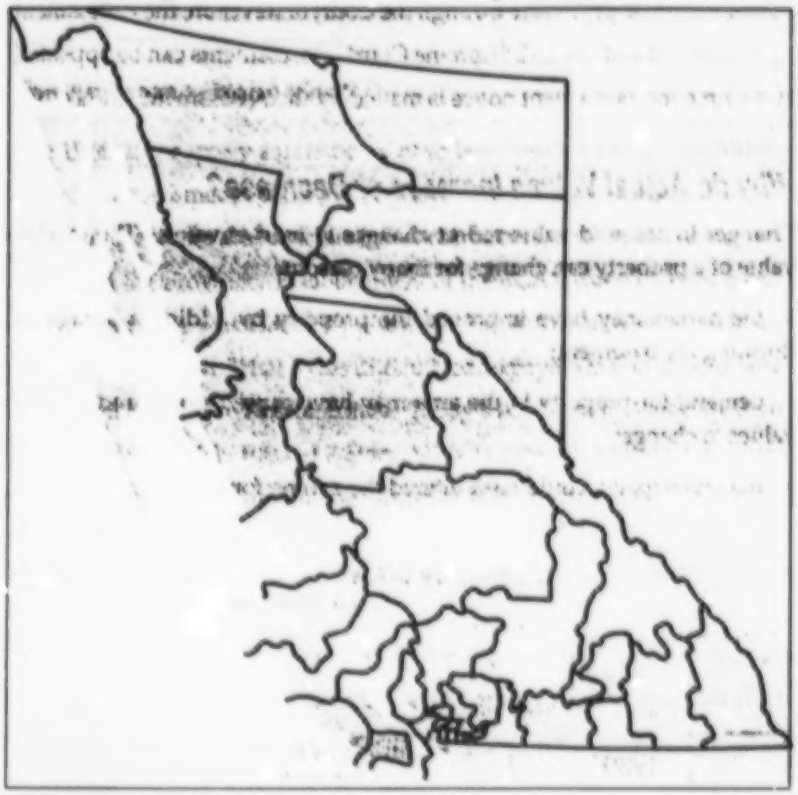
Assessment Classes

Properties are assigned to one of nine classes for assessment purposes. The taxing authorities can set a different tax rate for each class of property.

The nine classes are as follows:

1. Residential
2. Utilities
3. Unmanaged Forest
4. Major industry
5. Light Industry
6. Business and Other
7. Managed Forests
8. Recreational Property
9. Farm

The Regional District System



Spanning the Province

B.C. has 29 regional districts involving all of the province's municipalities and rural areas. Regional districts are very diverse. Their populations range from 1.3 million in Greater Vancouver Regional District to Central Coast with 3,200 residents. They serve from 730 square km in the Central Fraser Valley to 120,000 square km in Peace River.

Spanning both municipal and rural boundaries, regional districts deliver services to wide areas with common needs. Typically they coordinate services that a single municipality cannot provide, such as a large recreational complex, or a major sewage system.

Regional districts are B.C.'s way of ensuring that all residents have access to commonly needed services, no matter where they live. Beginning in 1965, B.C.'s regional form of government is one of the most innovative in Canada.

The regional district functions as a partnership of the municipalities and electoral areas within its boundaries. These local governments work together through the regional district to provide and coordinate services in both urban and rural areas.

The services offered by regional districts in British Columbia are varied and could include: fire protection and emergency programs; recreation and libraries; water supply and waste disposal systems.

The Function is Service

- Regional district boards respond to locally expressed needs for service and consult with residents about which services they can provide; where they are to be provided; and how the services are to be financed. A variety of

forms of consultation are used, including referendums and the receipt of petitions.

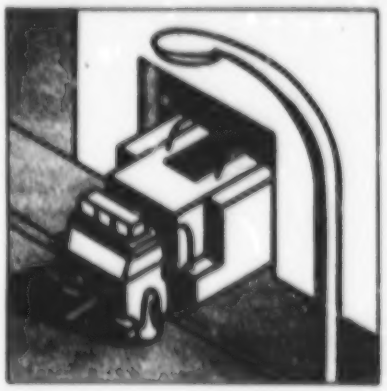
Some services may be provided to only part of an electoral area, while others are provided region-wide. Costs are recovered by billing the taxpayers benefitting from the services.

A typical regional district service line up might include:

- recreation and libraries
- fire protection and regulation
- street lighting
- solid waste disposal
- water supply and distribution
- sewage collection and disposal

Emergency telephone systems and curbside recycling programs are good examples of new services delivered by regional districts.

A separate body that shares the same geographic boundaries as the regional district is the regional hospital district. These districts provide the local share for financing hospital construction. They ensure that all the residents of an area that can receive hospital services make an equitable contribution to its capital costs. Regional hospital districts do not fund or direct the operations of hospitals; they are only involved in their construction.



Representing the People

Most of B.C.'s territory consists of rural areas outside municipal boundaries. These rural areas are home to 15 percent of the total population. Regional districts provide these residents with an effective form of local government while also representing municipal residents on regional issues.

Regional districts are governed by a board consisting of two types of directors. Electoral Area Directors are elected directly by rural area voters and serve three year terms. Municipal Directors are first elected to a municipal council and are then appointed by the council to the regional district board for a one year term.

The board selects its own chairperson, who generally sets up committees to deal with issues such as planning, environmental management, or economic development.

Local Government in British Columbia
– a community effort

has been prepared by:

THE UNION OF B.C. MUNICIPALITIES

The Union of B.C. Municipalities (UBCM) is an association that represents the interests of every municipality and regional district in the province. Through its Executive, which is composed of Mayors, Aldermen and Regional District Directors from communities throughout the province, it works with senior levels of government, both provincial and federal, in an effort to improve upon current legislation, regulations and funding arrangements.

Union of B.C. Municipalities
15 - 10551 Shellbridge Way
Richmond, B.C.
V6X 2W9

THE MUNICIPAL OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Municipal Officers' Association of British Columbia (MOA) is an association of municipal management officials. Its objectives include the improvement of municipal administration and management and professional development for municipal officials. The Association provides professional training to municipal officers through seminars and by encouraging the provision of courses through community colleges and universities.

Municipal Officers' Association of B.C.
200 - 880 Douglas Street
Victoria, B.C.
V8W 2B7

MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

The Ministry is responsible for the legislation governing local government, providing much of its financial assistance, and providing advice and assistance to local governments and the general public.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture
800 Johnson Street.
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4

design & illustration: Catharine Mackenzie

Citizen Participation

Become aware – become involved

ATTENDING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Council and regional district board meetings are usually held in the evenings in the offices of the municipality. Regular meetings vary, however, from weekly to bi-weekly to monthly. It is advisable to check with your municipal office for times and dates of meetings.

Meetings are open to the public, although the public may be excluded from certain limited parts because items to be discussed are of a sensitive nature, such as personnel matters, legal matters and land negotiations. The meeting is then said to be "in-camera".

Minutes of the proceedings are recorded in a minute book. The minutes are formally adopted at the next meeting as the true and correct record of the meeting. The minutes of the meeting, except for in-camera meetings, are open to public inspection, and copies of the minutes are available at a nominal charge.

MAKING YOUR VIEWS KNOWN

Most local governments have procedures so that residents can meet with their elected officials to discuss unresolved problems or to make presentations on matters of importance to the community. The Clerk's office is usually responsible for arranging appointments and will also advise on the procedures to be followed. Persons wishing to appear at a public hearing are not normally required to make an appointment. However, if the hearing is expected to involve a large number of speakers, appointments may be necessary. The Clerk's Office can provide information on the procedures to be followed. Persons addressing Council are required to state their name and address for the record.

ADDRESSING COUNCIL

When appearing before Council, the usual practice is to preface your remarks by acknowledging the mayor and council: "Your Worship, Members of the Council" is the form of address used. As the Chairperson of the meeting, all comments and questions must be addressed to the Mayor and not to individual members of the Council. The Mayor is usually addressed as "Your Worship" in recognition of the importance and dignity of the office.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR REGIONAL DISTRICT ?

If you have questions or concerns call your regional district office.
If you want to express your views in a public forum, you may wish to address the regional district board directly. The board holds monthly meetings which are open to the public. Start by writing a letter to the board chairperson or the director for your area, stating your wish to be heard.